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C O N F I D E N T I A L COLOMBO 001070

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR SA, SA/INS, DRL/IRF; NSC FOR E. MILLARD.
PLEASE ALSO PASS TO TOPEC.

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/23/2014

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SUBJECT: FOREIGN SECRETARY SAYS NO DRAFT ANTI-CONVERSION
BILL

REF: COLOMBO 1027 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Ambassador Jeffrey J. Lunstead. Reason 1.5 (b, d).

1. (C) During the course of a call on another subject on June 22, the Ambassador and Foreign Secretary H.M.G.S. Palihakkara discussed recent developments regarding a proposed GSL-sponsored anti-conversion bill. Despite local media reports that the Cabinet gave initial approval to a draft bill on June 16 and sent it to the Legal Draftsperson (in the Attorney General's office) for review and rewrite, Palihakkara clarified that the Cabinet had not/not instructed the Legal Draftsperson to draft a bill and that no draft bill can emerge unless she is told to draft one. Rather, Palihakkara said, the Cabinet had requested that the Legal Draftsperson's office provide an opinion on the draft bill. He noted that several Cabinet Ministers had expressed reservations about the draft bill.

2. (C) In response to the Ambassador's concern about anti-conversion legislation, Palihakkara noted that the GSL is aware of national and international concerns about the proposed legislation and explained that there is an initiative underway to address the issue of unethical conversions. He said that while all groups agree there is a problem, they do not agree on the definition of the problem or what to do about it. He noted that these issues are still being discussed and that "when agreement is reached, we'll leave it at that," as the GSL does not want to create a solution bigger than the problem.

3. (C) The Ambassador noted that if any bill emerged, it should be a positive one. One solution might be a voluntary "code of conduct" developed by religious clergy.

4. (C) COMMENT: Palihakkara made it clear that some GSL officials are concerned about the conversion issue and the prospect of legislation, that they are aware of international concerns, and that they are trying to steer the issue in a positive direction. Palihakkara also mentioned the GSL soon would be sending information about the issue to its embassies, presumably to better respond to international interlocutors. END COMMENT.
LUNSTEAD